

## **Catholic Archives Society Publications**

### **Archive Advice Leaflet number 13**

#### **Introduction to Records Management**

##### **Introduction: what is records management and why is it important?**

Records management is managing the records of an organisation from when they are created to their transfer to an archive or their destruction.

Everything produced by an organisation is potentially part of its archives. As well as paperwork, this includes work held on computers and stored in the cloud. The purpose of records management is to ensure that what needs to be kept, is kept and that what does not need to be kept is appraised and destroyed following an agreed system.

A records management programme encourages efficient identification, preservation and retrieval of archive material and rationalises the use of space. Information is less likely to be lost and enquiries are easier to answer if papers are systematically arranged and retained.

##### **Records management applies to records produced in any medium and is about**

- Systematic retention of current material, whether paper or electronic.
- Appraisal of semi-current material for retention or destruction.
- Retention of material for permanent preservation in permanent secure storage.

##### **The advantages of an ordered archive and of regular transfer and listing of non-current and semi-current material are that people know**

- Where the records of an organisation should be.
- What they consist of.
- When and how they can be referred to.

##### **Records management should begin by**

- Finding what key people are keeping.
- Encouraging them to take responsibility for their own records; the people who have created or added to files and who are responsible for the process that produced them are often the ones best able to decide what to keep.
- Encouraging them to look through accumulated filing, old boxes of papers etc.
- Encouraging them compile a list of files.

##### **The records may be divided into**

- Current/active use: supporting day to day work and decision making.
- Semi-current/occasional use: i.e. not in regular use or needed for current business but needed occasionally so should be retained for a specified period before destruction or transfer to the archives.
- Redundant/destruction: items no longer required for any of the purposes mentioned above and so suitable for destruction after appraisal and an agreed period of time.

- Archival: items retained permanently for legal, evidential, administrative and historical reasons and for reference and research purposes.

This has been called the records' life-cycle. 'Records' is the term generally used for current and semi-current material and 'archives' used for material agreed on for permanent preservation. This status can change e.g. deeds and plans held in the archives may return to current use if the property is altered or to be sold.

**The following should be kept while current and semi-current and then transferred to the archives after an agreed period of time**

- Minutes and supporting papers from key administrative bodies (if produced).
- Minutes of or notes on significant discussions or decisions from other meetings (if produced).
- Anything that could be required as evidence, both formal e.g. contracts, copyright declarations, title deeds and deeds relating to bequests and donations, and informal e.g. a letter of thanks for a gift or details of items lent for an exhibition
- Anything that must be kept to comply with legislation.
- Supporting material for new initiatives and major decisions, including dissenting views. Agreement should be reached at the start of joint projects on who will be keeping the archives, what should be kept and how the cost will be met.
- Source material relating to on-going projects or to projects that have been completed.
- Financial, employment, personnel and property management records in accordance with legislation.
- Reports and statements, with drafts only if significantly different from the final version.
- Letters that represent considerable research.
- Correspondence with significant people in and outside the organisation.
- Correspondence with possible legal implications.
- Anything before an agreed date, to be agreed after consultation.
- Anything that continues a series already in the archives.
- Master copies of newsletters and similar material circulated throughout the organisation.
- Items that reflect work and daily life e.g. programmes for meetings and conferences, details of events and celebrations.
- Other people's archives that relate directly to your own if you are certain that these are not being kept securely by the organisation that is creating them.

**The following need not be kept**

- Manuscripts, typescripts and drafts of reports etc. unless they indicate significant changes from the final version.
- Papers from non-permanent committees or groups after their final report has been endorsed.
- Everyday correspondence and notes once they have outlived their current administrative use.
- Multiple copies without good reason.

- Poor quality photocopies and transcripts if the originals are in the archives and in suitable condition for scanning or other copying.
- Ephemera and anything that has no value once it is no longer current, such as letters of acknowledgement, meeting and travel arrangements, invitations, acceptances, apologies and similar material.
- Papers relating to other organisations unless they have a direct bearing on the work of your organisation.
- Brochures, trade information, mail shots and similar items.

**The following should be kept for limited periods, e.g. one, three, five or more years, then reviewed for destruction or transfer to the archives. Review periods should be agreed formally and in some cases, e.g. policy documents, the review date should appear on the document**

- Papers arising from short lived projects.
- Papers from non-permanent groups once they have reported or achieved their end.
- General letters from other organisations.
- Letters on temporary issues that are considered and resolved.
- General correspondence (mainly emails these days).

#### **Electronic records and scanning**

- Electronic records need to be maintained and made accessible in the same way as paper records. They may become inaccessible unless managed properly.
- They must provide the same degree of evidence and accountability as paper records.
- They must be managed so they cannot be altered and must have their legal admissibility safeguarded.
- They are volatile and may become inaccessible unless managed properly.
- Keeping material solely in electronic format involves a commitment to data migration i.e. regular transfer to more up to date software and media. No format is going to last forever.
- For scanning for preservation it is essential the scanned image is good quality and enduring. Some companies offering 'scanning solutions' specifically exempt what they call 'mission critical' data. If a company is offering scanning, find out how long they expect their scans to last.
- There is a British Standards Institute Code of Practice for electronic records, BS10008.

- **General advice**

- Record creators and users should be aware that some paperwork needs to be kept for a period of years or permanently in the archives but not everything needs to be kept.
- Be aware of the need to transfer semi-current material to an appropriate store and material for permanent preservation to the archives.
- Record creators and users should consider if any paperwork for which they are responsible should be subject to restrictions on access.
- Make a dated note of the whereabouts of any file moved for a long period, particularly if it is lent to someone else.

- Have all major appraisal, disposal, de-accessioning decisions agreed to by senior people.
- Remember there may be legislation e.g. for financial or personal records and also church requirements; be aware of Data Protection and Freedom of Information legislation.
- Ensure that semi-current records are clearly labelled with dates of disposal or transfer to the Archives and that the Archivist is aware of them.
- Go through electronic files and accumulated paperwork from time to time.

#### **Exclusions**

- These notes cover the management of current and semi-current records.
- They do not cover other areas of archive management and policy making such as storage and use of archives.
- They are general advice on records management and do not cover compliance or other legal matters.

Further information is available from

The Information and Records Management Society [www.irms.org.uk](http://www.irms.org.uk)

The International Records Management Trust [www.irmt.org](http://www.irmt.org)

The National Archives [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)

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